

Third Sunday in Easter

April 19, 2026 • 10:30am

Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Robert B. Hadzor

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Good morning and good to see y'all. You too.

Well, it's a shame that the events of Easter Sunday are only one day. I wish I had a little bit more time to stay at the abandoned grave to digest what the events of that day really mean for our broken world and now for the salvation of all people.

Well, thankfully, we get a chance to do that today as we hear the story of Emmaus where two travelers are surprised by Christ and are invited into a new way of faith where Christ shows up when they least expect it.

Now, in today's reading, we are introduced to two disciples. One is named Cleopas and the other, although unnamed, is most likely his wife. In its early afternoon on Easter Sunday, they've begun the casual three-hour journey back to their everyday lives in a small town called Emmaus.

Now, while they're on the way, a stranger approaches them and asks a question. What are y'all talking about?

The travelers have two options. Do they tell the truth? Do they risk the possibility that the stranger isn't friendly and might report them to the Romans and get them arrested? Or do they just keep their heads down and choose to ignore the man's question altogether and just keep on going by themselves? Well, thankfully, our two travelers had listened to the lessons of Jesus so they bravely extended their hospitality.

So, they respond with another question. Do you really not know about the things that have happened? And like a brilliant book where the readers know something

that the characters don't, we smile, we lean in as Jesus then says, what things? They begin their story. They share their sadness that their friend Jesus, whom they saw as a prophet, the Redeemer of Israel, had just been killed innocently in Jerusalem.

They express their disappointment that the temple officials, they did nothing to stop it. And it looks as if Rome's grip on Israel was there to stay. But most ludicrous of all, they said, they share that some women who followed Jesus had gone to the tomb earlier that morning and found that it was empty.

They said that Jesus is alive again because of something called a resurrection. But we've been taught that that's a heresy in our faith. Once finished, the stranger begins to speak.

And by memory, he begins recounting the holy stories of Israel. Hasn't God always been present, even in the darkest of times, he says. And when they fail to respond, he continues.

Well, didn't the Hebrews need to go through slavery and bondage before they could experience freedom and peace from Egypt? Or what about the Kingdom of Israel? Didn't they need to experience defeat and exile before they could find renewal and rebirth? Maybe, the stranger says, you need to begin looking at the events of the last few days, not from a place of ending, but from a place of continuation of God's great story. Now, by the time the travelers arrive at Emmaus, the sun has set. The stranger shows no intention of stopping for the night.

However, the travelers invite him into their home for some food and some rest before he continues on his way. And as they recline around the table, the stranger takes bread, he blesses it, he begins breaking it, he begins handing it out. And it's in this moment that their eyes are opened, and at the table is their best friend, Jesus.

Before they get a word in edgewise, he just disappears. Without a word of departure, poof, he's just gone right from their midst. And the two are left speechless.

They're in disbelief. How did they not recognize Jesus when they were walking alongside him that whole time? How would they not notice that their hearts were on fire as they listened to this man's voice? And without a minute to lose, the two travelers, they decide that the others in Jerusalem, they need to know this right away. So they gather up their supplies.

They journey back down the road to the holy city. Their pace is no longer casual. It's filled with great urgency.

I like to think that after Cleopas and his wife report their news to the disciples, they then run back to the tomb of Jesus. It's around sunrise now on Easter Monday, and as they approach, they notice some cloaks and spears of some Roman soldiers that had thrown them to the ground in fear the day before. At their feet, the remnants of flowers brought to the tomb by the Marys.

They start to litter the ground around them, some of them moving very gently in the morning breeze. And then they see it. It's the tomb itself.

The first thing they notice is this faint smell of nard that's coming out of this big empty space. And as they get even closer, their eyes catch a glimpse of this fringes of a white cloak that had been thrown to the ground. It was just laying in bunches as if it was thrown off in great haste.

But other than that, there's only darkness. And it's at this moment that they have a decision to make. Do they stay outside the tomb? Do they continue the lifestyle of trying to understand the mystery of Easter through their own reasoning? Or are they brave? Do they trust that transformation awaits them within that empty space? We are all travelers on the road to Emmaus.

And at any given time, we could be at one or the other side of that journey. But unfortunately, a lot of us spend the majority of our lives closer to Emmaus than we do to that empty tomb. Our anxieties, the struggles of our world, they're very present.

There's famine, there's war, there's deception, there's apathy. We know that Jesus is somewhere, but we have a really hard time seeing him. Well, the Franciscan priest and a spiritual author named Richard Rohr has a beautiful way to escape these moments.

He invites us into what he calls the liminal spaces of God. In his explanation, Rohr empathizes with the everyday Christian. He, like you and me, are often spiritually stuck in a state of normalcy.

But he says it's not our fault. It's just the current condition of modern spirituality. The modern Christian typically only engages in our faith when we need something from it.

This means that we only ever experience Christ in the ways that we want to experience Christ. We set parameters and we leave little to no room for Christ to do what Christ wants to do for us. But liminal spaces, they invite us into something new.

It's a place to be vulnerable with God. It's a place where our desire to control is abandoned. We just simply be still and just know that God is working in this chaos and then inviting us to come and see how.

When we experience this space, the normalcy of our faith is transformed. It's made into sacred ground where we continue to grow. But how do we see these spaces? Well, thankfully, we have a Savior who is very smart.

Christ is a master at finding a way to break through to us. But Christ can only extend the invitation. It's us that must be the one who's willing to act on it.

But what if we miss the invitation? What if we, like Cleopas and his wife, continue just to be trapped in our own understanding of all that had happened? We can't even see Jesus and the fire that his words have lit in our hearts. We don't even feel them. Well, thankfully, we also have a Savior who is patient.

Jesus isn't a one pony. Sooner or later, what Christ desires for us to see will be revealed. For Cleopas and his wife, Jesus chose to invoke an image, something from their memory, a simple loaf of bread, which helped lift this fog that had descended upon them.

The story of Emmaus invites us to experience how Christ is speaking to all of us. It calls us to make intentional effort to slow down, to be present with ourselves and with God. But what if, after all this, it still doesn't work? Well, maybe we need to look at the moments in our own faith where we feel a deep connection with God.

For Cleopas and his wife, it was the image of bread. Maybe you too experienced this moment in the Eucharist, or maybe at a baptism, or maybe when someone prays with you, or seals you with anointing oil, or maybe it's not even something religious at all. Maybe it's just simply having a cup of coffee with someone who knows you and allows you to be truly you.

The possibility of liminal spaces are incredible. They are everywhere, but it comes with one large caveat. These places are not inhabitable.

They're transitional places. Like an oasis in the desert, it's a moment for nourishment, but we can't set up camp there. When Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his wife at the table, he didn't stay there.

He disappeared. He vanished. That meant that Cleopas and his wife had to feel that inspiration.

They were immediately called to action. They returned to Jerusalem with the same news to share with others. This was how Christ welcomed them to come back close to the Easter story again.

Earlier I mentioned how I wished the events of Easter Sunday weren't just one day. I said this because Easter is the easiest way for me to find a liminal space. The colors of the morning, the hymns we sing, the celebration of Jesus's triumph over evil, it isn't hard to see Christ's position in our lives in those moments.

But after that day, as the weeks have gone by, it feels like I'm right back on that road to Emmaus again. The news, interactions with the world, there's such a brokenness that has started to take center stage once again. But Christ is walking with us.

Christ is right here, right now, inviting us to see him on the road. He extends opportunities to experience your liminal spaces. All we have to do is abandon the grip that we have that's choking our faith because we want to understand it the way we want to and entertain the idea that Christ might have something more to say.

My prayer for all of us this week is that we find opportunities to find these places, the spaces that help us to return to the tomb with anticipation. I pray that we set intentional and prayerful time to ask God, where are you desiring to meet me? I pray that we reject the idea that our faith is normal because it's anything but that. May our faith be one of action and not reaction.

And most importantly, I call us to pray for those around us, our fellow travelers on that dusty road to Emmaus. May we steward that journey for one another. May we rejoice to walk with one another on this sacred ground and watch as we are renewed time and time again.

Amen.